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How Can Teachers Support Students Who Suffer from Test Anxiety?

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How Can Teachers Support Students Who Suffer From Test Anxiety?

by

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How Can Teachers Support Students Who Suffer From Test Anxiety?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Due to recent legislations like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) annual testing has become a reality for today's elementary school students. "Concerns over accountability in the public schools have led to a nationwide demand for yardsticks by which school districts, schools, teachers and students can be measured and compared," (Triplett and Barksdale, 2005, p. 238). This increased pressure to excel has not only impacted teachers but has contributed to students' development of anxiety, specifically towards testing (Whitaker Sena, Lowe, & Lee, 2007). Hembree defines test anxiety as a state of emotion underpinned by qualities of fear and dread and characterized by a feeling of uncertainty and hopelessness in the face of danger (1990). Test anxiety according to Black is a performance anxiety resulting from a fear of being judged by teachers, parents and classmates (2005).

Prior to NCLB, Hill and Wigfield (1984) stated, "Two out of three children in a typical classroom are highly anxious and perform quite poorly on evaluative situations... nationwide 4-5 million children in elementary and secondary schools experience strong debilitating anxiety" (p. 110). According to Black, testing anxiety has become far more prevalent over the past 30 years affecting up to 40 percent of third through sixth-graders at levels ranging from moderate to severe (2005). Test anxiety is a growing concern that needs to be addressed in today's schools.

Standardized tests contribute to widespread test anxiety, says Black (2005). She writes, "Recently a fourth grader who had just finished taking a state math test told me 'The worst part was dividing fractions. I got so nervous I thought I would faint'" (p. 42).

There is an extensive amount of empirical evidence of the negative effects of test anxiety on academic performance (Hancock, 2001; Hembree, 1988; Hill & Wigfield, 1984; I. Sarason, 1984; Whitaker Sena, et al., 2007; Wine, 1971). Test anxiety interrupts the recall of prior learning therefore degrading performance says Hembree (1990). This is because the highly test-anxious subject is internally focused on his or her intrusive thoughts and since the difficult tasks (which the test anxious person does poorly) require full attention for adequate performance he or she cannot perform adequately (Wine, 1971).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine strategies classroom teachers can use to support students who suffer from test anxiety. This is done through; (a) a short survey about teachers' views on test anxiety (b) a focus group discussion with those participating teachers and (c) a short one-on-one interview with three of the six participating teachers. For the purpose of this study, test anxiety is defined as "feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, heightened somatic reaction, anticipations of punishment or loss of status and esteem, and implicit attempts to leave the testing situation" (Sarason & Mandler, 1952, p. 166). Although there continues to be no easy cure for anxiety, various small changes can be made by teachers to their classroom environment or their practices that can ease their students' feelings of anxiety, especially in regard to testing.

Scope

The population of this study is small. It is limited to one school and consists of six fifth grade teachers: four are regular classroom teachers and two are special education cooperating teachers. The reason for such a small number of participants is to ensure that

discussions are in depth and detail-oriented. Choosing the population is also a matter of consistency. If there are various strategies that can be implemented at one grade level, then it can be said that there would also be many strategies for each grade level, though establishing such generalizability is beyond the scope of this research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The History of Test Anxiety and Its Components

The following literature review will discuss the history of test anxiety and its components. It will examine the growing importance of testing and its affect on students suffering from anxiety. Possible interventions are also suggested and explained.

Researchers differ widely about such matters as basic definitions, constructs and outcomes in relation to anxiety and testing anxiety. However, researchers (Hembree, 1988; Tryon, 1980; Wine, 1971) credit Mandler and Sarason as the originators of the test anxiety theory, presented in their study in 1952. Students were asked to complete a Test Anxiety Questionnaire, which asked students to rate their reactions to various types of test situations. Based on their responses, groups of students were categorized as high-or low-test-anxious. The students were then given intelligence tests in which the low-anxious students outperformed their high-anxious peers in both the scores and their variability (Hembree, 1988; Sarason & Mandler, 1952).

Mandler and Sarason interpreted the difference in performance on the basis of two psychological drives evoked by the testing situation. The first is task-directed drives, which stimulate behaviors to reduce the drive by completing the task. The second is task-anxiety drives. These stimulate two opposite and incompatible behaviors: task relevant efforts to finish the task and thus reduce anxiety and self-directed, task-irrelevant responses that impair performance (Hembree, 1988). The pair also created the first definition of testing anxiety, which was discussed previously in the Introduction. Mandler and Sarason set the stage for anxiety research and following their study, other researchers developed their own theories and definitions of test anxiety.

In 1967 Liebert and Morris proposed that test anxiety is bidimensional, consisting of two components, worry and emotionality. According to them, worry is “any cognitive expression of concern about one’s own performance” (p. 975), while emotionality refers largely to a person’s awareness of bodily arousal and tension such as perspiration, rapid heartbeat and shallow or rapid breathing (Hembree, 1988; I. Sarason, 1984; Whitaker Sena, et al., 2007). The work of Liebert and Morris shifted the focus of test anxiety in a cognitive direction and thus guided future researchers’ focus more toward the worry component of anxiety.

In 1971 Wine proposed an attentional theory to explain how test anxiety harms performance, which fits nicely into Liebert’s and Morris’ worry component. According to Wine, test anxious persons divide their attention between task-relevant activities and preoccupations with worry, self-criticism, and somatic concerns. Thus with less attention available for task-directed efforts, their performance is inhibited (Hembree, 1988; Wine, 1971).

According to Hembree (1988), all these theories comprise an interference model of test anxiety, wherein the worry component of test anxiety disturbs the recall of prior learning and thus degrades performance. However, this model has been challenged by Tryon (1980) who argues that treatment can effectively reduce anxiety but better performance usually fails to accompany test anxiety reduction. Tobias (1985) also argues an alternative deficit model saying, “the lower test scores obtained by test-anxious students are attributed to inadequate study habits or to deficient test-taking skills” (p. 135). Even so, Hembree’s study examined and compared the two models (interference and deficit) and concluded that behavioral and cognitive-behavioral treatments (both of

which support the worry/interference model) were effective in test anxiety reduction while study skills training did not seem effective in reducing test anxiety.

Further study of the worry component, by Hembree (1988) found that worry might be a stronger factor in test anxiety and cause lower test performance than emotionality. Stöber and Pekrun (2004) also believed that the worry component is directly related to lower examination scores.

According to Nitko (2004) there are three types of test-anxious students. The first type is one who lacks the proper study skills or the ability to organize or comprehend the main ideas for the content being taught and perhaps her fear of testing results from a lack of competence. The second type of test-anxious student possesses proper study skills, but also possesses “fears of failure” when experiencing assessment. The third type believes he possesses quality study skills but in reality does not. This definition will not be included in the current discussion of test anxiety because it confuses overconfidence with anxiety, and thus has been less used and developed.

It is important to note that regardless of how one chooses to define anxiety, there is a general consensus that it is a severe problem facing students today.

The Growing Importance of Testing

Testing and testing requirements have increased in the United States since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 by President Bush. The four pillars that make up NCLB according to the U.S. Department of Education website (n.d.) include 1) increased accountability for States, school districts and schools, 2) greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools, 3) more flexibility for States and local educational agencies in the use of Federal education

dollars and, 4) a stronger emphasis on reading. In order to hold school districts and schools accountable, schools are required to assess students in reading and math each year in grades three through eight and once in grades 10 through 12. At the start of this past school year schools were also required to assess students in science at least once in grades three to five, six to nine and 10 to 12 (U.S. Department of Education). Schools are then being held accountable for their students' performance on these high stakes tests. Everything from teachers' jobs and pay, school funding and the promotion of students to higher grades depends on the results of these tests. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of these high stakes tests has been an increase in anxiety among many elementary students in U.S. schools (Whitaker Sena, et al., 2007).

As the consequences of test performance assume a more important role, school children will experience more and more apprehension about assessment, and as a result more children will experience strong anxiety and many of these students will do even less well (Hill, 1984, as cited in Hill & Wigfield, 1984).

Effects of Anxiety

It has already been argued that the abundance of standardized tests students are faced with today share some responsibility for increasing the number of students suffering from anxiety. However, it is not entirely fair to place all the blame on the tests. According to Hill and Wigfield, anxiety can emerge as early as the preschool or elementary school years when parents begin to make unrealistic demands or hold overly high unrealistic expectations for their children's performance. The pair also points out that at about second grade children begin to compare their performance with other children which can lead to competition and pressure to do better (1984).

Hill and Wigfield assert that, “evaluative pressure contributes greatly to performance differences between high-and low-anxious children” (1984, p. 111). Researchers (Hancock, 2001; I. Sarason, 1984) believe that under comparable conditions high-and low-test-anxious students perform similarly. However, when an evaluative component is introduced, a flag indicating danger goes up for those who are prone to anxiety (I. Sarason, 1998). Wine (1971) refers to this as the “evaluative dimension” or the degree to which the subject believes that he is being or will be evaluated on the basis of his task performance (p. 96). Wine continues saying, that conditions at the extremes of the dimension affect the performance of high-and low-anxious students. Hancock (2001) cites a study by Zatz and Chassin (1985) in which the two found that students with high-test anxiety performed more poorly on tests than do students with low or medium test anxiety only in classrooms in which students perceive that the threat of evaluation is high.

Hancock (2001) conducted a similar study in which he examined the effects of students’ test anxiety and teachers’ evaluation practices on students’ achievement and motivation to learn (in a postsecondary research methods course). He found that test anxiety interacts with the classroom variable of evaluative threat to affect students achievement levels and that highly test-anxious students are adversely affected by classroom conditions that are perceived as highly evaluative. His study suggests that students who are more test-anxious are significantly more sensitive to environments in which competition is emphasized and teacher control is evident. He also concluded that students with test anxiety are also significantly less motivated in classrooms perceived as highly evaluative.

Hancock (2001) argues that teacher feedback can help students if it is done correctly. He suggests that feedback from teachers can direct students' future efforts by highlighting the topics that have been learned and those in need of improvement, which leads to enhanced student confidence. Furthermore, when students know what is needed to improve their abilities they perceive control over achievement which enhances their learning.

Test anxiety is one of the most important aspects of negative motivation and has direct debilitating effects on school performance (Hill & Wigfield, 1984). This is because highly anxious children are more sensitive to failure and react more to evaluation from adults than low-anxious children do. More specifically, high-anxious children have strong motives to avoid criticism and failure because they fear negative evaluation. In contrast, low-anxious children are more motivated to approach success and obtain praise since they do not have as much fear of failure. These differing motivational patterns have important behavioral consequences. Low-anxious children are more likely to choose, persist in, and enjoy the challenge of evaluative situations, be less concerned with adult reaction to their performance, and strive to do well. On the contrary, high-anxious children try if possible to avoid highly evaluative situations, are overly concerned with parents' and teachers' evaluations of their performance, and choose, persist, and do better on easy tasks in which success is more certain (Hill & Wigfield, 1984).

Other debilitating affects of test anxiety in children are negative self-evaluation, and concentration difficulties (Whitaker Sena, et al., 2007). According to Wine's (1971) attentional theory, people at high and low levels of testing anxiety differ in the types of thoughts to which their attention is directed in the face of an evaluative stressor.

“Experimental studies of test anxiety,” according to I. Sarason, “have provided evidence that cognitive interference is an important factor in lowering the performance of highly test-anxious people” (1984, p. 930). Researchers have found that persons with high test anxiety are more likely than those with low test anxiety to blame themselves for their performance level, feel less confident in making perceptual judgments and set lower levels of aspiration for themselves (I. Sarason, 1984). Hill and Wigfield (1984) cite Nottelmann and Hill’s 1977 study during which they observed fourth and fifth graders as they performed an anagrams task. They observed that the high-anxious children were off task more and asked fewer task-related questions than low-anxious children. The high-anxious children also performed less well.

Interventions

Teaching encompasses various forms of assessment. Supon (2004) suggests that teachers implement a broad array of both traditional tests (essays, multiple choice, matching, etc.) and performance-based assessments (project-centered instruction, rubrics, oral presentations and journal writing). According to Supon “The emphasis is that teachers use continuous means of assessment throughout, not just at the end of a chapter or course exams” (2004, p. 293). Implementing such formative factors can assist in preparing students for multiple types of assessment so they are comfortable when testing occurs and can help the teacher obtain a broader view of students’ abilities as well as more meaningful results.

All assessments, traditional or alternative, will have some anxiety because of the evaluative factors, which are constant. Therefore, it is important to discuss other ways to support students suffering from testing anxiety. Supon (2004) encourages teachers to

practice “habitual prudence” (p. 293) in being aware of their conduct when teaching, preparing tests for students and when administering assessments. She suggests such considerations as adequate space, lighting, room temperature, and minimizing distractions by placing a sign on the door. She also mentions respecting test-anxious students by not using red pens to score tests. Triplett and Barksdale (2005) conducted a different type of study in which they examined 225 elementary students’ perceptions of high-stakes testing through the use of drawings and writings. In the study, students reported that when their teacher played the role of comforter and supporter it helped them deal with their anxiety related to testing. One student wrote, “Mr. Z wrote good luck on the board in big letters so I felt better.” Another student wrote, “Ms. K let us take our shoes off and chew gum. She wanted us to be comfortable.” (p. 257). Triplett and Barksdale (2005) suggest that having a comforter close by may ameliorate children’s feelings of isolation and alienation and may decrease children’s feelings of powerlessness and increase self-confidence.

Other researchers (Hill & Wigfield, 1984; Wine, 1971) discuss instructional variations as a strategy to diminish testing anxiety. Wine cites a study by Sarason, Mandler and Craighill (1952) that looked at instructional manipulation. In “ego-involving” instructions, subjects were told that they should easily complete the test within the time limit, when it was made impossible for them to do so. The results from the “expected-to-finish” test were compared to the nonstressful “not-expected-to-finish” instructions, which informed subjects that no one could expect to finish within the time limit. In general, they found that the high-test-anxious subjects did better following the

“not-expected-to-finish” instructions while the reverse was true for low-anxious subjects (p. 95).

Other instructional variations involved comparisons of: (a) “ego-involving,” “highly motivating” instructions, which inform the subject that his task performance will reflect his ability, (b) minimal task instructions and (c) instructions which assure the subject that his task performance will not be used to evaluate him (Wine, 1971, p. 95-96). The results from the aforementioned studies generally reported an interaction between level of test anxiety and evaluation emphasis: (a) highly test anxious subjects perform more poorly following highly evaluative “ego-involving” instructions than nonevaluative “anonymous” instructions while again, the reverse is true for low-test-anxious subjects and (b) following highly evaluative instructions, low-test-anxious subjects perform better than their high-test-anxious peers. While following nonevaluative instructions, high-test-anxious subjects perform better following minimal task instructions, high-and low-test-anxious subjects performed at about equivalent levels halfway between their performances in the highly evaluative and nonevaluative conditions (Wine, 1971, p. 96). “Thus, changes in instructions that reduce evaluative pressure or change children’s expectations about successful performance benefit anxious children” (Hill & Wigfield, 1984, p. 117).

Others like Hill and Wigfield (1984) suggest removing time constraints. The pair cites a study by Hill and Eaton (1977) that assessed how reducing time pressure influenced fifth and sixth grader’s performance on basic arithmetic computation problems given in individual testing sessions. Their results indicated that under time limits, high-anxious children showed two to threefold performance deficits in both speed and

accuracy. However, when time limits were removed, high-anxious children performed about as well and as quickly as low-anxious children. Hill and Wigfield (1984) also cite Plass and Hill's 1979 study that extended the Hill and Eaton study from 1977 to a more testlike situation. In this study third and fourth graders did age-appropriate math problems in small groups. Children performed under group-imposed time limits in one condition while in the other condition they were given all the time they needed to finish. Just as expected, the high-anxious children performed less well than low-anxious children under time limits.

Although the intervention strategies discussed have shown success in helping high-anxious students perform better on school achievement tests, Hill and Wigfield (1984) argue that more needs to be done. They discuss two kinds of projects made to teach students how to cope with the demands and pressures of testing. The first project is an individualized tutoring program to help children identified as having special test-taking problems do better on tests. The second is a classroom-teaching program to prepare students for testing.

The tutoring program targets the needs of individual students who are having difficulty with and often do poorly on classroom tests. The program teaches students how to cope with high test anxiety, time, pressure, difficult problems and to use effective test-taking strategies focusing on specific problems: high test anxiety, considerable off-task behavior, lack of effort, negative attitudes and writing difficulties. It is staffed by undergraduate students and members of the research staff. The success of the program is assessed by having judges rate each tutored student's progress on the classroom tests. Initial results were rated as making good or excellent progress (Hill & Wigfield, 1984).

The classroom-teaching program is meant to familiarize students with the demands and pressures of standardized testing. What began as a one-to-two-session program was expanded into an eight-session classroom-teaching program dealing with test-taking skills and positive motivation. Each session began with some reminders about test strategy and motivation and then the children practiced on problems that teachers developed for the program. The goal of the practice testing was to familiarize children with the general kinds of test instructions, question and answer formats, answer sheets, and other aspects of testing they would encounter on any achievement test. The effectiveness of the program was documented. Two teachers with 34-second graders in their classrooms implemented the program and three teachers of 31-second grade students served as the control group. The 65 students were given a pretest that was used to assess gains from the teaching program while controlling for individual differences in achievement. After the four week, eight sessions program the children's scores on a full-scale achievement test were analyzed. The teaching group scored at the 71st percentile on average for the overall achievement test, while the control group scored at the 61st percentile. These results are encouraging and show that a program such as this could have a strong impact within schools today (Hill & Wigfield, 1984).

Throughout the past century, many researchers have contributed to the ongoing exploration of test anxiety. Although various theories abound, there is no doubt that test anxiety exists. Partnered with the growing importance and frequency of testing, test anxiety is on the rise. However, there are strategies available to help students cope with the ever-changing testing requirements.

Chapter 3: Methods

We live in a world in which testing is a driving force in schools. The enactment of NCLB has dramatically increased the frequency of testing. In testing situations, many students become anxious, and this anxiety can negatively impact their performance.

The goal of this research is to gather a sampling of strategies teachers employ to support their students who experience test anxiety. This study is not meant to interpret the effectiveness of such strategies, just that they exist.

Participants

As stated earlier in the Introduction, the study's sample size is intentionally small. It is limited to six fifth grade teachers from one rural elementary school in Western New York where the researcher has access, and is not a random sample. The six teachers, who have eight to 25 years of experience, are part of two teaching teams. Each team consists of two classroom teachers and one special education consultant teacher.

Data Collection

When determining how to collect data for this study, the researcher looked at three different techniques: observing, asking/reflecting and examining. Observing students would be too intrusive and thus create more anxiety, and examining is not a possible choice because no data was being documented. Therefore asking and reflecting are the only possible means for data collecting. Within asking and reflecting there are many ways to collect data. Most means for collecting data are very structured including formal interviews and conferences. These are not options because each interview would need to be different and based on the individual's answers to the written survey. Another option is attitude scales but a scale on students' anxiety does not exist. Reflections are also

another means of data collection, however for this research there is no need for teachers to reflect. The only possible means for data collection left then are surveys, focus group interviews and informal interviews.

During the first step in the data collection process, each participant will complete a short written survey (see Appendix C) that contains the following questions:

1. What is test anxiety?
2. Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?
3. What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?
4. Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If so, what?
5. What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test anxiety?

Following the completion of the individual surveys the participants will meet together for a focus group discussion that will last between 40 and 60 minutes. This will allow the participants an opportunity to discuss their survey responses together with their teammates as well as other professionals.

Finally, after the focus group three of the six participants will be randomly selected for a one-on-one interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. During this time the participant will have an opportunity to elaborate upon responses made during both the written survey and the focus group discussion. The participant will also have the opportunity to discuss any personal experiences with students suffering from test anxiety.

For example, a participant may be asked to share a specific example of a student who was experiencing test anxiety and what she did to support the student.

Data Analysis

The one-on-one interviews, as well as the focus group, will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcripts, along with the survey results and data from the one-on-one interviews will be analyzed for common themes in definitions of test anxiety, common trigger behaviors of students, as well as common strategies the teachers use to help support students who experience test anxiety.

Limitations

The limitations to this study include the fact that the participants do not represent a random sampling. All participants teach fifth grade at the same elementary school and they all have relationships with one another. All the participants team-teach together in teams of three consisting of two classroom teachers and one special education consultant teacher. Lastly, data collection is limited to surveys and interviews and does not include first hand observations of teachers' interactions, a process that might reveal more subtle and nuanced ways that teachers do or do not support students who experience test anxiety.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study, as stated in the Introduction, was to examine strategies classroom teachers can use to support students who suffer from test anxiety. This was done through individual surveys, a focus group discussion and individual interviews. The participants were limited to six fifth grade teachers from one rural elementary school in Western New York where the researcher has access and was not a random sample. The six teachers have eight to 25 years of experience and are part of two teaching teams, consisting of two classroom teachers and one special education consultant teacher per team. Claire, Lee and Emily are part of one team and Brea, Colleen and Nancy are part of the other team. Emily and Nancy are the two special education teachers. (These names have been changed to protect the participants.) The goal of this research was to gather a sampling of strategies teachers employ to support their students who experience test anxiety. This study was not meant to interpret the effectiveness of such strategies, just that they exist.

Individual Survey Results

After consent was obtained each participant was asked to complete a short survey answering questions based on their views of test anxiety. (For complete surveys please see Attachment D.) The survey consisted of five short answer questions. The responses to each question are discussed below.

The first question asked each participant to define test anxiety. Lee, Emily and Claire all included the word “nervousness” in relation to taking tests (whether it is before during or after the test) in their definitions. Nancy defined test anxiety as “Any anxiety that affects exam performance”. Whereas Colleen and Brea were more specific in their

definitions Brea said, “Test anxiety is stress related to taking a test; physical and mental distress as a result of feeling insecure about performance.” Colleen went a little more in depth discussing test anxiety’s negative impact on a student’s ability to show his or her knowledge on a test. Regardless of the variations, all their definitions fit closely with the definition of test anxiety the researcher chose for this study (as stated in the Introduction) in which Sarason and Mandler define test anxiety as “feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, heightened somatic reaction, anticipation of punishment or loss of esteem, and implicit attempts to leave the testing situation” (1952, p. 166). The participants were introduced to this definition and given a chance to discuss it during the focus group discussion that will be discussed later.

The second survey question asked “Do any students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?” The response to this question was a resounding “Yes” from all the participants. Brea also admitted that she herself has always had a great deal of test anxiety. Colleen added that she sees test anxiety across the board with both high and low achieving students. Nancy said that she especially sees anxiety during formal state assessments due to the formal atmosphere where reading directions are longer and more involved. She also discussed the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Exam and how teachers can’t assist students with difficult words. Nancy feels that all of these factors increase students’ anxiety. Although Claire answered that a few of her students have test anxiety, she also admitted that she wishes that more of her students had it because then they would take tests more seriously. This point is discussed further during the focus group discussion.

The third question on the survey asked the participants what types of behaviors they observe in their students that signal to them that their students are anxious. The common responses were asking questions or showing uncertainty, taking an extra long time to complete the exam and various forms of body language like tenseness, tears, pleading eyes, sock pulling, playing with hair and pinching fingers (as stated by Claire, Lee, Brea, Emily, Colleen & Nancy). Another common response was showing avoidance behaviors such as sharpening pencils, getting drinks or tissues, or asking to go to the bathroom, library or nurse (mentioned by Brea, Emily & Nancy).

Question four asked the participants if they do anything to help their students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test and what it is they do to help. Common responses included giving inspirational messages, pep talks or positive reinforcement of abilities (Brea, Lee & Emily). Claire, Lee, Nancy and Emily give their students plenty of notice and teach test preparation skills to build confidence and familiarize students with the test format. Nancy, Colleen and Emily all mentioned relaxation techniques; Colleen and Emily discussed stretching exercises. Colleen also stated she has her students “shake out the tension” while Emily has her students do Braingyms. Colleen also revealed she discusses feelings of anxiety with her students. Finally, Emily mentioned a “penny strategy” she uses for those who get extremely nervous in which she says, “My mom gave me this penny, and I will give it to you for the test”.

Question five asked if the participants had any advice for other teachers who have students who experience test anxiety. Both Colleen and Brea mentioned using humor to relax students. Emily insisted building a rapport with the students and not testing them in unfamiliar settings. She also mentioned using small bits of strategies rather than lots of

talking because if the teacher dwells on the test too much it increases a student's anxiety. Emily finished by encouraging the teaching of relaxation techniques before the day of the test so that the students have time to practice them. Nancy insisted that teachers assume that all students have small levels of anxiety about testing, especially formal state tests. She also added that teachers should prepare well in advance and act in a calm and organized manner and go over things the students can do during the test to reduce their anxiety.

Focus Group Data

After the survey data was analyzed, all six participants (Claire, Lee, Emily, Brea, Colleen & Nancy) met together for a focus group discussion where they discussed questions prepared previously by the researcher based on their survey responses. (Please refer to Attachment E for the transcript of this discussion.)

At the beginning of the focus group all participants were introduced to Sarason's and Mandler's definition of test anxiety (as it pertains to this study) and were given an opportunity to discuss the definition. Claire spoke up first saying, "I feel like kids have test anxiety because they are afraid they are not going to achieve. Is that in here somewhere?" Lee, Nancy and Colleen responded saying they felt "anticipations of punishment or loss of status and esteem" incorporated fear of failure (Sarason & Mandler, 1952, p. 166). Brea also added she felt as if the definition was more emotional than academic but didn't elaborate. No one else had any further comments about the definition.

The first question posed to the participants was based on Claire's survey response in which she stated she wished more of her students had test anxiety so they would take

tests more seriously. The question was whether or not they see a difference (in scores or otherwise) between students that experience test anxiety and those who do not take tests seriously. Claire responded that she felt that the scores of those who don't take tests seriously are lower because they blow through the test quickly. However Brea intervened saying she feels it is on both ends of the spectrum. She explained saying, "You get the high kids who are nervous because they care and then you get the low kids who didn't study and they are terrified. They both have test anxiety but their grades are on opposite ends of the spectrum." Nancy agreed with Brea and added that the kids who blow through the test sometimes have anxiety accompanied by a lack of confidence and just end up picking an answer because if they try hard and do terribly it's harder on their ego rather than if they just blow through the test and thus do poorly they can just say they didn't care. Nancy continued saying those with test anxiety and those who don't take tests seriously are in the same group, just another part of the group. Nancy also discussed multiple choice tests saying that she felt those were the most difficult tests for kids with test anxiety. Colleen agreed saying anxious students often over think questions or assume someone's out to trick them which just intensifies their anxiety.

The next question dealt with avoidance behaviors of students who experience test anxiety. Typical anxious behaviors (as stated in the afore-mentioned surveys) include asking questions, taking an extra long time to complete the exam and various forms of body language including tenseness, tears, pleading eyes, sock pulling, playing with hair and pinching fingers. The participating teachers were asked how they discriminate between students with test anxiety and those students who exhibit similar avoidance behaviors because they are unprepared. "I think it's very similar" Emily responded, "and

you have to just get to know the students and you'll get to know who is serious and who is just a nervous student, because I think that if you are exhibiting test anxiety you probably are anxious in other situations too." The focus then turned to pressure that students put on themselves for fear of failure. Lee pointed out that some students get so nervous ahead of time that they avoid completely and sometimes that nervousness is for reactions from their peers, teachers or even their parents. Nancy jumped in at this point saying that in some instances, when scores (of certain high stakes tests) are sent home parents believe that score is the real truth about their child, when in fact it is one day and one test. Then the parents begin to push or pressure their child based on that one score and not the child's global history in school.

Next the researcher wanted to know if there was any one behavior associated with test anxiety that occurred more often than others. After a short conversation the participants all agreed that body language, excessive movement and asking questions before or during a test, were the top three anxious behaviors they observed the most from their students who suffer from test anxiety.

The question of scores was discussed next and whether the participants found that a student's test anxiety had an affect on that student's scores in either a negative or a positive manner. Emily remarked that she didn't really feel there was one answer to the question because it depends on the student and his studying ability.

"We have a really, really, really bright student who is very nervous about tests and I'm sure she goes home and really studies, studies, studies. And there's another student who is anxious in about every situation and I'm not sure he knows how to study. So maybe he'll go home and look at his study guides, but he really doesn't know how to study and really isn't grasping the main ideas. So I don't know if it's the anxiety that is making them not do as well."

Emily stressed a student's ability to study. However Lee suggested that a student's test anxiety can psych her out. Brea was able to admit she's seen it in herself many times. She revealed that her own test anxiety has affected her scores on tests because she becomes unable to think straight. She also remarked how difficult it is as an educator to balance between students who have test anxiety and those who do not saying, "You want to raise the level of concern for the students who don't care without terrifying the kids that already have test anxiety because if they hear the message it just scares them more. You really have to watch what you say." Lee then referred to the physical repercussions she's seen with kids who have severe test anxiety which include headaches, stomach aches and avoiding coming to school at all.

When asked if the participants aid higher achieving test anxious students differently than those who are not as high achieving, Colleen indicated that she addresses it with her whole class by discussing who is anxious and by leading the class in exercises that "shake out the stress". Claire disagreed, keeping in mind those students who are classified and have Individualized Education Plans, saying that the higher achieving kids may just need a little bit of guidance whereas the lower kids might need a restatement of directions, especially if they are classified and we are able to give them those modifications. This question then led to a discussion about what types of students have test anxiety.

When asked what the general ability level is of their students with test anxiety everyone agreed that there is no general level and that personality was the main factor. "Even a well prepared student can have test anxiety" Brea explained, "even a student

who feels like they studied. It has nothing to do with their ability level at all. It has to do with their personality and self-confidence.”

Finally, the researcher wanted to know what each participant’s top strategy was for supporting students with test anxiety. Emily reiterated her response from her survey insisting it is all about building a rapport with her students saying, “I am a special educator, so it’s hard for me when someone says ‘This kid needs this, so he is going to go with this teacher who he’s never met before.’” She continues saying that having a student take a test in a very normal environment with a teacher that student knows is the best way to reduce test anxiety. Colleen believes it is important to infuse a little bit of humor to help relax her students before a test. She also insists that owning that there is test anxiety and discussing it together as a class is essential. Lee also restated the importance of positive reinforcement and reminding students that they are familiar with the content of the test and are well prepared. She also focuses on test taking strategies. Nancy once again maintained the significance of the teacher breaking down the formal directions, normalizing her voice and taking her time as the test is explained. Lee added that infusing one’s own personality is also important when reading directions to all students. Claire was the last to respond saying that she tells her students “I just expect you to try your best and that’s all I can ask of you.” Emily took Claire’s comment a step further by reminding everyone that it is important to follow through with statements like Claire’s after the test has been corrected by saying “Everyone really did his/her best” so that the students know their teacher really means that they just need to do their best.

Following the focus group discussion the researcher planned on conducting three one-on-one interviews that would allow the participants a chance to expand upon

responses made during the written survey and the focus group discussion or discuss any personal experiences with students suffering from anxiety. However, at the conclusion of the focus group the researcher did not feel any further data or discussions with the participants were necessary. Therefore no interviews took place. Throughout each method of data collection the participant's responses remained consistent. Most of the survey responses were discussed further during the focus group and most of the participants' responses remained the same across the board.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine strategies classroom teachers used to support students suffering from test anxiety. Based on the survey and group discussion results several generalizations can be made.

Many students exhibit physical manifestations of anxiety due to testing. These physical signs can range from tears, hair or sock pulling and stressed expressions all the way to blatant avoidance behaviors and attempts to leave the testing situation. Anxiety can also be expressed via the asking of many questions prior to taking an exam. This data suggests that there is no one telltale sign that a student is experiencing test anxiety. Therefore it is essential for a teacher to know his students and be observant and aware of their behaviors prior to and during testing.

Test anxiety is a reality in today's schools. The results of this current study suggest that there are strategies that classroom teachers can use to support their students who suffer from test anxiety. Although there isn't one specific strategy that can alleviate a student's anxiety, these strategies may make the anxiety more manageable. It is also important to note that this research did not assess the effectiveness of such strategies, just the fact that they exist.

A lot can be said for the way a teacher conducts her classroom in relation to testing. Many of the participants encouraged other teachers to be supportive of their students prior to and during testing. Words of encouragement, pep talks and reinforcing abilities all help to build student confidence. This supports Triplett's and Barksdale's (2005) research that stated when a teacher plays the role of comforter and supporter

students' anxiety decreases. The participants also stressed keeping the environment familiar for the students. This can be done by remaining calm and infusing a bit of humor and personality when reading the instructions or explaining the test. All of these strategies support Supon's suggestions of making the testing environment comfortable for students (2004).

Relaxation strategies were mentioned frequently throughout the research process. Relaxation exercises like "shaking out the tension" (Colleen) were suggested as a way to decrease student's anxiety. Similarly, discussing and facing the fact that students were feeling anxious about tests was also recommended. As stated in the Literature Review, Hill and Wigfield (1984) had similar recommendations in their discussion of two projects created to teach students how to manage the demands and pressures of testing. Each program emphasized teaching students how to cope with various aspects of testing like time, pressure, difficult problems and the use of test taking strategies.

Recommendations

It is apparent that as schools become more responsible for the achievement of their students that testing will continue to be a necessity. Undoubtedly, as the consequences of such tests become direr the pressure to succeed felt by students and teachers alike will increase and with increased pressure comes increased anxiety. This researcher firmly believes that more needs to be done to help students experiencing test anxiety. Many possible interventions have been suggested; however it is time to assess the effectiveness of those interventions. This study has recorded first hand strategies used by practicing fifth grade teachers to help support students suffering from test

anxiety. These strategies now need to be tested and assessed for their effectiveness in both fifth grade and across other grade levels.

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Appendix One: Completed Teacher Surveys

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety?

Stress related to taking a test. Physical and mental distress as a result of feeling insecure about performance.

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

Yes. I personally have always had a great deal of test anxiety and recognize it easily.

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

They look at you with pleading eyes, practice avoidance behaviors such as using the bathroom, getting a tissue, sharpening a pencil. They say they can't do it or don't understand.

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If

so, what? Inspirational messages "You know this material, read carefully, do your best work, relax..." I try to minimize the anxiety without letting them think it isn't important.

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test

anxiety?

Use humor to relax students. Let them know that they have the ability to do well.

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety, seems to be when people get nervous prior to a test. (before or during).

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

A few students in my classroom have test anxiety. (I wish more had it.) Mostly, most of them look test more serious.

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

They seem very unsure of themselves even though they know the material. They ask a lot of questions. They take an extra long time to complete the exam.

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If

so, what? I give them plenty of time to study. I give them reminders. I try to gently answer questions the best I can during the test. I try to lead them in the right direction w/out giving them the answers.

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test

anxiety? Try some of the strategies mentioned previously. I think it's up to us if those things you can do for them to help.

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety?

When the fear of taking a test/results from a test negatively impacts a student's ability to show further knowledge on a test

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

Some do -

High kids, as well as some who have

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

body language: fidgetiness
asking questions

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If

so, what? We talk about how we're feeling, stretch out before the test + shake out the tension.

(If you vigorously shake your arms & hands for a few minutes, when you stop, your fingers tingle, I say that this is the tension leaving your body)

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test

anxiety? Relax + then will relax. minimizing the expectations on the student

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety?

nervous feeling during a test or when preparing for a test

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

yes

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

- pinching fingers together
- playing with hair
- lots of questions
- avoiding "I have to give this to the nurse, can I go to the library?"
- huffing when asked questions
- crying / head down

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If so, what?

pep talk "Don't worry"

- relaxation techniques / Braingym
- good test prep
- "to the ones you know / 1st"
- penny strategy for those who are extremely nervous /

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test anxiety?

- build rapport - testing in unfamiliar settings increases anxiety.
- don't dwell on them - small bits of strategies rather than lots of talking.
- my opinion is that if we dwell too much, it can make it worse. Also, teach the relaxation technique BEFORE the test so that they have time to practice in a relaxed state.
- "My mum gave me this penny, I will give it to you for the test..."

teach the relaxation technique BEFORE the test so that they have time to practice in a relaxed state.

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety is an increased level of concern, worry, or nervousness prior, during, and after any form of assessment.

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

A small percentage of students become anxious.

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

- Ask questions frantically before/during the test.
- Facial expressions are stressed
- Occasionally tears or "shutting down" behaviors

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If

so, what? - Plenty of notice / study time, guides groups

- Clear expectations
- Learned test taking strategies
- positive reinforcement of abilities

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test anxiety? See above ↑

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What is test anxiety? To consider any anxiety that affects exam performance to be problem behavior that I would label test anxiety.

Do students in your classroom become anxious prior to or while taking a test?

Yes. This is true especially for formal state assessments. The atmosphere is formal. The reading of directions longer and more involved. In the ^{NYS} ELA we can't help them with difficult words. All of this increases their anxiety and limits their ability to pull information from memory.

What behaviors do you observe in your students that signal to you that they are anxious?

Frequent questions and statements that they don't understand. Breaking pencils; pulling at socks; going to bathroom; needing a drink; looking at other students work; remaining on the same page or question when they have no idea what to do.

Do you do anything to help students overcome test anxiety before giving them a test? If

so, what? Stretching exercises, strategies to mark difficult questions to go back to them. Good general preparation to build confidence and to familiarize them with the test format. Encourage good nights sleep, good breakfast, snack during test, 5 min. break during test.

What advice do you have for other teachers who have students who experience test

anxiety? Assume that all students have some level of anxiety about testing especially formal state tests. Prepare well in advance and present yourself in a calm and organized manner. Go over things students can do during the test to reduce their anxiety.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Transcript

Participants: Claire, Lee, Emily, Brea, Nancy and Colleen

Researcher: (Referring to a copy of the definition on the table –see Attach C) For the purpose of this study and discussion, test anxiety is defined as “feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, heightened somatic reaction, anticipations of punishment or loss of status and esteem, and implicit attempts to leave the testing situation” (Sarason & Mandler, 1952, p. 166). Does anyone not agree with this definition?

Claire: I feel like kids have test anxiety because they’re afraid they are not going to achieve. Is that here somewhere? I’m thinking of a couple of kids in our rooms this year and they are afraid of failure. Is that in there anywhere?

Lee: I think that could be loss of status.

Nancy & Colleen: I think its loss of status.

Claire: Oh yes, I see.

Brea: The definition seems more emotional than academic.

Researcher: That is a very nice point thank you. Does anyone want to add to that? (No answer) Alright well, our first questions is, do you see a difference between students that have test anxiety (in your eyes) and those that do not take tests seriously? Do you see a difference between scores or just a general difference?

Claire: Certainly. There are students who kind of blow through the test and they would get lower scores. Whereas most of the time a student, this year, who has test anxiety, many times will... (Trails off)

Brea: I think it is on both ends of the spectrum. You get the high kids, who are nervous because they care, then you get the low kids who didn’t study and they are terrified. They both have test anxiety, and as far as grades they are on both ends of the spectrum and it’s kind of the middle that’s left out.

Nancy: Brea, I agree with you. I think that kids who blow through the test sometimes have high anxiety. They are so lacking in confidence about taking the test, that they just pick an answer. They don’t see themselves as able to pick the answer. Especially on multiple choice tests which I think are the worst test for kids with test anxiety. They just pick an answer. They assume that they don’t know it so they just choose.

Researcher: So do you think the kids with test anxiety do worse than those who don’t take tests seriously?

Nancy: I think they are in the same group; they are just in another part of the group. Because I think they blow through the test because if they try hard and do terribly it's harder on their ego. If they just blow through the test and don't do well, they can just say, 'I didn't care'.

Colleen: And Nancy, to piggyback on that a lot of times in multiple choice tests, kids will over think because of test anxiety because they think that somebody's trying to get them or they are trying to find the ins and outs of each answer and that just adds to their anxiety.

Brea: Stellar point Colleen. Sometimes your first instinct is the best.

Nancy: And it's not a trick question.

Researcher: Some students don't study. There are a lot of students that just don't study-

Claire: Or don't know how to study-

Researcher: Right. They don't take the test seriously and they don't study and they exhibit avoidance behaviors similar to those who experience test anxiety such as, going to the bathroom etc. So, how can you tell the difference between those test anxious students and those who are trying to avoid the entire situation because they are unprepared?

Emily: I think it's very similar and you have to just get to know the student and you'll get to know who is serious and who is just a nervous student. Because I think that if you are exhibiting test anxiety you probably are anxious in other setting also.

Researcher: Right, so you could tell.

Emily: Right, you could tell that that person is more of an anxious student and that this person is just maybe avoiding. However avoidance could also be the fact that they're nervous because maybe they didn't study or something along those lines.

Researcher: Right, so that might be another cause of their test anxiety, thank you Emily. Anyone else want to add to that?

Brea: Well maybe they studied a lot and they just don't have self confidence and even though they studied they don't trust themselves and they think they don't know it but they really do.

Research: Thank you for that point Brea.

Nancy: I think also on that, some students who are apathetic, it's a long history of test failure and then the apathy comes in and it's sort of a protective thing. They may not look anxious but they really have given up. And that is an extension of a long period of extreme anxiety about who you are as a student and what you can achieve, and they just

step back and they look totally unmotivated. Pulling those kids back is actually harder than kids with test anxiety.

Lee: A lot of it has to do with the pressure that they put on themselves, for fear of failure. They get nervous ahead of time and therefore automatically, instead of setting themselves up for failure, avoid completely. Or nervousness for reactions from the teacher, peers or even parents' expectations.

Researcher: I was going to ask that next, do any of you feel as though you have students whose parents cause their children to have test anxiety?

Everyone: Sure. Very much so. Definitely.

Researcher: Thank you everyone!

Nancy: And you know what? Sometimes those tests, because the scores, like the New York State high stakes tests, are sent home, it's almost like that is the real truth to them. Its ONE day. A couple hours period, and they think that is the truth about their kid and so they push them based on that one score alone and not their global history in school.

Researcher: Thank you Nancy. Next, out of many of the behaviors that you listed on your written surveys about your students behaviors like having lack of confidence, avoidance, stressful expressions, melt-downs, sock pulling etc. Is there any one behavior you see that is most predominate or common?

Nancy: You know what I see? I see it's when the really bright kids start to finish they anxiety heightens for the kids that are struggling, and all of a sudden a lot of people start to finish.

Colleen: That's true Nancy. They watch each other and they gauge their own feelings and anxiety on each other.

Brea: But as far as, going back to the question, what do we see the most, I think usually the rule for a serious test is to stay in your seat. So you don't get the wandering on a state test. But I guess it depends. You know that they are not focused and are not working, they're thinking.

Nancy: Brea, I think that when students are showing high anxiety during the test, I think that sometimes they need a little movement and you just go by what Emily said earlier, you go by how well you know the student and some of those students need movement to release some of that tension and that helps them. Other people are just totally avoiding and you know those students and to those students you say, you need to stay in your seat.

Colleen: I think of the day of the test, right before the test you can see it in their body language. You can see the kids that are tense, that are scrunched in their seats, or their

head is down or they are tapping their pencils and you can see that the anxiety is coming out in their body language.

Lee: Asking a lot of questions like before the test. How long do we have? Is this a number two pencil? How many questions are on it? What if I don't finish?

Brea: Is this going to count for my report card?

Researcher: So I think most of you are saying, body language, movement and asking questions are the three main ones?

Claire: Even before or during the test, yes.

Researcher: I've seen that a lot too, I'd have to agree with you all there. Do you find that a student's test anxiety affects their scores in a good way or a bad way?

Emily: Well I mean I guess it really is going to depend. I don't really think that there is a great answer to that question. I just think of certain students this year especially, we have a really, really bright student who is very nervous about tests and I'm sure she goes home and really studies, studies, studies. And then there's another student who is anxious in about every situation and I'm not sure he knows how to study, so maybe he'll go home and look at his study guides, but he really doesn't know how to study and really isn't grasping the main ideas of what's going on so I don't know if it's the anxiety that is making them not do as well.

Researcher: Right, maybe it's their lack of studying ability?

Emily: I think so. In this particular case, I think so.

Lee: I think that test anxiety itself can blow a student out of the water- can psych them out.

Researcher: Have you seen it?

Lee: Yes

Brea: Yes, I've seen it in myself especially.

Researcher: I was going to ask you that, Brea, I know in your survey you mentioned that you, yourself have test anxiety.

Brea: Absolutely.

Researcher: Has it affected your scores on tests throughout your life?

Brea: Yes, it really has. I really can't think straight.

Colleen: She is much more brilliant than she is on paper.

Researcher: It seems that way for other students as well?

Brea: I will tell you, as an educator I find that most students don't have test anxiety; you want to raise the level of concern for the students who don't care without terrifying the kids that already have test anxiety because if they hear the message, it just scares them more. You really have to watch what you say.

Claire: It's a fine line.

Lee: And there could be physical repercussions as well with kids who have severe test anxiety; headaches, stomach aches and avoiding going to school at all.

Researcher: Do you find that, for the higher achieving test anxious students you aid them differently than those who are not as high achieving?

Colleen: I address it with the whole class. We talk about test anxiety before the test and we talk about ways to relieve our stress. We get up and exercise and shake out all the stress and do things like that with all the kids because I don't see a big difference with how we treat the higher kids with test anxiety than with how we treat the lower achieving ones.

Claire: I think you would maybe treat them differently. The higher achieving kids might just need a little bit of guidance whereas the lower kids might need a restatement of directions or something a little bit more specific, especially if they are classified, and we're able to give them those modifications.

Researcher: Thank you Claire. Next, what is the general ability level of your students who experience test anxiety? Is it oftentimes the lower achieving students or your higher students?

Brea: I don't think there is a general level. It's a personality thing.

Everyone: I agree.

Researcher: It goes across the board? And you don't find it more predominate in an ability level?

Lee: It is definitely more of a personality trait.

Brea: Even a well-prepared student can have test anxiety, even a student who feels like they studied. It has nothing to do with their ability level at all. It has to do with their personality and self-confidence.

Researcher: Thank you Brea. One final question- and I would like each of you to answer this, if you can. In your survey responses each of you mentioned different strategies that you use to help support students with test anxiety. What would you say is your top strategy and why?

Emily: I feel like it is definitely rapport. I am a special educator so it's hard for me when they say, 'This kid needs this so he is going to go with this teacher who he's never met before.' Sometimes I think I could lose my mind because I think that he doesn't know her and that's not fair. If he's already an anxious student that's not fair to him. I don't know if that's necessarily a strategy but I just feel like having a student take the test in a very normal environment with a teacher that student knows would be, I feel like the best way, or at least one major way to reduce some anxiety. And there are all kinds of little strategies that depend on the student and how well you know them that you can try to do. But I would say rapport and making sure that, that environment is their normal environment would be, I think the best.

Colleen: I would agree with Emily. I think the infusing a little bit of humor and that relaxing the kids before the test helps out. And owning that there is test anxiety, not ignoring that it is, but saying, 'How many of you were nervous? How many of you didn't sleep last night?' and talking about the test anxiety before they even start and letting them know that, that's a normal part of how fifth graders feel.

Lee: I know that what I do is before the test, I positively reinforce them and let them know that they know the information, they've gotten it in class before, we have discussed it, we've practiced it and that they can do it, just trying to build their confidence. Letting them know that nothing on the test is going to be new to them and that if they prepared at home and they've paid attention in class then they should feel confident that they can do it. Talk about using their test taking strategies; remove it from the test itself and put it on other qualities that they have. If they get stuck, what are the strategies that you have learned to come up with the right answer. I focus on the strategies rather than it's just them and that they don't know the answer.

Researcher: Thank you Lee.

Nancy: I would add to that that I do all of those things, but it's also how you read the directions. The directions are very formal and breaking them down and like Colleen said, normalizing your voice and taking your time rather than whipping through the questions because of your own anxiety and following directions.

Emily: I agree because I remember taking tests and thinking, 'Why does the teacher suddenly sound like a robot?' I was so nervous. And like Nancy said, kind of slowing it down and I know that there is the part of administering a test that we are all supposed to say the same thing but I don't think that you need to sound like a complete robot.

Lee: You can infuse your own personality into it.

Claire: There is just one more thing I would like to add, and that's just that I say to my kids 'I just expect you to try your best and that's all I can ask of you'.

Emily: And actually I think Claire that actually following through with that is important too. Because sometimes you say it and then the next day there's a grade and some teachers want to use certain high-stakes tests as a grade on a report card so I think if Claire says to her students, "I only expect you to do your best" she should follow through with that and say that "Everyone really did their best" then the kids start to know that she means it, and we really only need to do our best.

Researcher: Thank you Emily and Claire. Is there anything that anyone else would like to add? Any final notes?

Colleen: I think it's a shame that we have to test so much and that we create test anxiety for kids and that so much is weighed heavily on test scores that this is even a problem. I just wish that we could teach and not have to worry about all the tests we have to give.

Nancy: Sometimes when we have a third day of testing it's ridiculous. On the third day they are so burned out by that third day that I don't think the results are as accurate as the first day. I think they should be one day tests and I think we should be able to limit it to that to get a feel for how they are doing. Sometimes I feel like I'd rather test on four consecutive weeks at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year so that we aren't periodically testing throughout the year.

Researcher: And one final thing that actually Colleen's comment brought to my mind is that do you think that different forms of assessment such as performance based assessment; portfolios etc. help decrease students' anxiety more than written multiple choice or short answer?

Lee: Sure.

Brea, Colleen & Claire: Yes.

Emily: I feel that performance assessments are more authentic but I also feel like the kids don't feel like it's a test because they have been trained like we have to know that the high-stakes tests are the big ones. These other things aren't as import because they've been trained, grades three through eight have been trained that these are the important tests, these are the important test that when they do take some of the other types of tests they do feel less anxious because they have been trained that those are less important.

Researcher: Thank you Emily. Is there anything else that anyone would like to add before we are finished? Well then I would just like to thank all of you for your participation and for sharing your beliefs and opinions.